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Community Update on Cyberstalking by Lori Saroya, Ex-Staffer



CAIR

Ismail Allison January 20, 2022 1:18 pm

(WASHINGTON, DC - 1/20/2022) On January 20, 2022, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, our nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization released the following statement regarding allegations of cyberstalking and other misconduct against former staff member, Lori Saroya.

In a public letter, CAIR's National Board of Director wrote:

"Dear friends, supporters and partners:

May peace be upon you. On behalf of CAIR's national board of directors, we hope this message reaches you in the best of health and spirits. We are writing to tell you about a situation that CAIR has been working to resolve for some time. This will be a long message, but we want to share as many details as we can, from beginning to end.

As some of you know, a former CAIR national staffer has spent the past several years using anonymous email accounts and social media profiles to cyberstalk, smear and undermine our national office, local chapters, volunteers and community partners with help from anti-Muslim extremists. That former CAIR staffer is Lori Haidri Saroya.

Lori was once a valued member of our team. She served as a chapter leader and a board member. Many of us considered her not only our colleague, but our friend and sister. Sadly, that changed after she took on a new role as our chapter relations manager. During her tenure, we received numerous complaints that Lori was engaging in abusive and obsessive behavior toward her co-workers, particularly a female leader in our Maryland office. Outside community members also complained about her behavior.

Those complaints led Lori to face investigations, disciplinary action, conflict resolution counseling, and, ultimately, the threat of a restraining order from the female co-worker she was accused of harassing. We eventually had to bar Lori from attending an event in Maryland hosted by that staffer and then hire security when she initially insisted on attending.

Despite all of this, we did not cut ties with Lori. We had known her for years and we cared about her well-being. While we were doing everything we could to address her conduct and get her the help that she seemed to need, she resigned from CAIR in 2018.

Shortly after leaving us, Lori began to publicly and privately attack our civil rights organization. Her early behavior ranged from the petty (such as leaving negative reviews on the Facebook pages of nearly every CAIR chapter) to the disturbing (like accusing us of withholding reimbursements due to her).

After months of her online attacks failed to harm us, Lori changed course. She hired Daniel Horowitz, an Islamophobic, anti-Palestinian attorney, to target us. Years earlier, Mr. Horowitz had tried to sue CAIR on behalf of far-right radio host Michael Savage.

In 2019, Mr. Horowitz sent us a letter on behalf of Lori that accused us of being involved in an international terrorist conspiracy, among many other crimes. Horowitz threatened to ask the Trump Administration to target us unless we paid Lori over half a million dollars. He also threatened to edit, update and file Michael Savage's old "RICO" lawsuit against us, this time on behalf of Lori.

We immediately rejected these ridiculous, unethical demands and reported them to law enforcement. As we wrote to Lori and Horowitz at the time: *"If you truly believed that CAIR and other American Muslims are engaged in a criminal conspiracy to topple our own nation at the behest of mysterious foreign agents, then why would you offer to conceal such a treasonous plot in exchange for money?"*

After we rejected Horowitz's demands, he and Lori did not act on their empty threats. In fact, to this day, she has never filed a single lawsuit against us. This is telling. She and her anti-Muslim allies have accused of being fraudsters, terrorists, abusers of women, and almost everything else under the sun, yet she hasn't used any of her well-funded, high-powered attorneys to sue us based on her claims.

Instead, she has spent years using anonymous email accounts and social media profiles to continue attacking us while periodically seeking money from us. At this point, she has sent hundreds—perhaps thousands—of anonymous emails to disrupt our work. In addition to spreading Islamophobic tropes and conspiracy theories about CAIR, Lori has alleged that the organization is a hostile environment for women.

However, Lori actually recognized and praised our commitment to gender diversity when she was part of CAIR. For example, Lori once filed a complaint against a male co-worker who had inappropriately screamed at her and other employees. At the end of her complaint against this employee—whom we ultimately terminated—Lori wrote:

CAIR is a progressive, inclusive organization with women leaders at all levels. I had many positive experiences at both the chapter and national level, and saw firsthand that diversity was valued. During my 10 years with the organization, I regularly witnessed CAIR's national leadership engage in efforts to be inclusive of women. There were real efforts to recruit women for senior positions, uplift them, invest in their leadership, and give them equal opportunities. These isolated incidents reflect an individual who does not adhere to the organization's values and culture, they do not represent the organization or its leadership."

Despite her own words and the fact that women play major leaderships role in CAIR, Lori has sent hundreds of anonymous emails claiming otherwise to our friends, supporters and partners for several years. When we or our chapters participate in public events, Lori often sends anonymous anti-CAIR emails to anyone involved—panelists, organizers, sponsors, political candidates, journalists. In 2021, Lori also began to launch vitriolic personal attacks against current and past female leaders of CAIR. Her anti-CAIR page in Twitter was repeatedly suspended for violating their rules.

After enduring this obsessive and destructive cyberstalking for years, we decided to file a defamation lawsuit against Lori in 2021 to expose the truth and protect our team in a court of law, where the truth matters. It's easy to smear innocent people on social media or in anonymous emails sent in the middle of the night; it's harder to do so in a courtroom, where lying under oath is a crime.

In response to our lawsuit, Lori secured a large and well-funded legal team with a new Islamophobic attorney: Jeffrey Robbins, a columnist and former ADL director (<https://newengland.adl.org/jeff-robbins-on-radio-entrepreneurs-this-monday/>) who has praised anti-Islam extremist Ayaan Hirsi Ali (<https://apnews.com/article/75047f6da5a64640864d7b32ebe8ec02>), described Rep. Cori Bush and other members of Congress as the " Hamas Caucus," (<https://www.bostonherald.com/2021/11/29/robbins-the-hamas-caucus-gets-it-wrong-on-gaza/>) and once defended a group accused of defaming (<https://pluralism.org/news/islamic-society-boston-lawsuit-proceed>) a Massachusetts mosque.

Despite her legal team's considerable resources, Lori was not able to defeat our lawsuit. A few weeks ago, the judge overseeing the case ruled in our favor and denied Lori's motion to dismiss our lawsuit.

Although we could have moved forward with our complaint, we decided over the holidays—after much deliberation—that we should instead, once and for all, move on from this years-long conflict with Lori Saroya.

There are several reasons why it was time to get out of mud with Lori and her anti-Muslim allies.

First, the litigation had already allowed us to prove her conduct: working with Islamophobes, sending hundreds of anonymous emails in the middle of the night attacking our civil rights organization, harassing us and our supporters on social media, among many other things. She did not deny any of these claims in her response to our lawsuit, so we have already proven those facts.

Second, we were not willing to let Lori use the litigation to harm our chapters or the broader Muslim community. Lori's attorneys were using the discovery process to overwhelm our chapters, drain their resources, and even demand the names of CAIR supporters who have donated to us, among other private information that anti-Muslim groups have long wanted to acquire. We would never risk letting the community's information fall into the hands of Lori or anti-Muslim groups.

At a basic level, our primary responsibility is to ensure that CAIR fulfills its mission to serve and protect the community. We simply could not justify spending the next year using up our time, draining our resources and risking our community's privacy to prove what has already been proven about Lori Saroya.

Through her actions and her associations, Lori has discredited herself. She isn't trying to fix a problem within CAIR; she's trying to destroy CAIR's reputation, even if that means working with Islamophobes who oppose everything she stood for when she was a civil rights activist.

Again, we want to emphasize that Lori has never sued us for any of the claims she makes online. Even after we sued her last year, she didn't countersue us. In fact, the only formal action Lori ever filed against CAIR in all these years was a complaint to a DC employment agency claiming that we had been withholding reimbursements due to her. The agency completely dismissed her complaint after we provided clear evidence that Lori's complaint was unfounded.

Although we are now done dealing with Lori Saroya, we continue to fight against the Islamophobic extremists who want to divide and conquer our community from within by using us, Muslim Americans, against each other.

We recently saw this pattern with the revelation that Muslims like Romin Iqbal were working as spies for an anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian hate group. These groups cannot and will not succeed in tearing our community apart, insha Allah.

Finally, we cannot stress this point enough: our fight to defend ourselves from Lori Saroya was not a fight with anyone else who may have a legitimate complaint to raise about their experience at a CAIR office. If anyone ever has experienced—or ever does experience—mistreatment in our organization, we encourage them to file a formal complaint so that we can investigate and take appropriate action.

CAIR is a Muslim civil rights organization guided by Islamic principles and dedicated to the pursuit of justice for our community. That includes seeking justice for our staff and volunteers.

We thank the community for their support and encouragement throughout this difficult time. May Allah SWT guide, forgive and unite us. As always, please contact us if you have any questions.

Jazakumullahu khairyan.

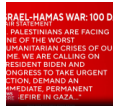
Sincerely,

CAIR National Board of Directors

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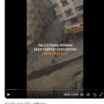
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